

Around MAYURI ver1.2

SpiritNo.???
Uniform-???

橘公司

The author
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DATE

デート
万由里ア라운드
ver1.2

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RE 天宮駅 Tengu Station

LIVE



ラタスク文庫



デート・ア・ライブ
万由里アラウンド
Date a Live Mayuri Around

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"Today you'll accompany me to all the places that I want to go to. That's what we agreed on."

To fulfill the promise he made to the mysterious girl, Mayuri, Shido threw himself into a date with her.

"So you're having a secret rendezvous in a place like this, huh?"; "My Shiori-san sensor suddenly started ringing."; "Eh? Ah----Shi-Shido-san?!".

Videogames, Cosplay Shop, Neko Café... ...Before the Spirits, who show themselves as they are, and appear wherever they go on a lively ordinary day, even the always stubborn Mayuri began to show her smile naturally----

----This is a story that could have happened, on a certain day.

“... ..”

Inside the crowd that came and went, Shido Itsuka was absently looking up at the sky.

A few blurry clouds were scattered on the blue sky, in which the sun had not yet fully risen. A sudden breeze stroked his cheek and a dry leaf crossed his field of vision.

It wasn't like a solar eclipse was happening or that an unidentified flying object was flying. It was just an ordinary landscape. In fact, there were lots of people around. However, the only one looking up at the sky was Shido.

But----why was that?

Shido felt an odd sensation from that most common sky.

“... ..I wonder what this feeling is.”

He said to himself in a whisper. He couldn't figure out the true identity of that sensation. Shido lowered his gaze as he scratched his head and looked around.

His current location was an open area which was on the opposite side of the Tengu station. A big fountain could be seen on the front. And to the right there was a statue of Pachiko, the faithful dog.

Since there were several objects with characteristic features such as these, this was a place that was often used as a meeting point. And since today was also a holiday, a lot of people could be seen walking around.

Shido slightly tilted his neck as he watched that scene.

“Eh?.....Why was it that I came here for?”

Because he had been distracted for a while now, or maybe the opposite, he had completely forgotten his objective.....He couldn't decide what the actual reason for forgetting was but, his conscience was not entirely clear to worry about that now. A feeling like he was sleeping in warm water had invaded his body completely.

However...

“----Ah.”

Within his visual field, he saw a girl walking towards him from within the crowd----Shido felt as if the sun's rays penetrated through the morning fog.

You could say that her age was a year younger than Shido's. She was a girl that had her long blond hair combed into a ponytail that she kept to the side. She was wearing a pure white uniform and was carrying a bag on her shoulder, which had funny-looking pendants and key rings.

Her face was so charming it could steal your heart before you even noticed, but the expression on it was that of loftiness.

"---Mayuri."

Shido said the girl's name unconsciously.

Then, at the same time he said that, today's objective began to appear inside his head. Which he had completely forgotten up until now.

"Ah.....That's right. I wonder why I forgot about it. I promised to have a date with Mayuri today."

That's right. Even now he couldn't remember when he made that promise--- But at least he could clearly remember that he did.

Then, when he said that, Mayuri slightly moved her eyebrows upon noticing Shido. But without changing her pace, she approached him slowly.

"---Hello."

She said that in an antipathetical way. Shido raised his hand and answered her.

"Y-yes... ..Good morning."

"Did I keep you waiting?"

"No, not at all."

"I see."

Mayuri coldly replied that and then gestured with her chin and continued.

"Well then, let's go."

"Nh.....Yeah. You're right."

After hearing that, Shido started walking from where he was standing.....And softly spoke to Mayuri.

"... ..Hey, Mayuri? Where were we supposed to be going today again?"

After Shido asked that looking sorry, Mayuri turned to him while squinting.

"You don't remember?"

"No, well... I'm sorry."

He felt it would be dishonest with Mayuri to give some kind of excuse. He said that sincerely and lowered his head. Then Mayuri, after letting out a small sigh, continued her words.

“Today you’ll accompany me to all the places I want to go to. That’s what we agreed on.”

“Ah.....It’s true.”

After hearing that, he somehow remembered making such a promise. Shido slightly nodded.

“Indeed. We also agreed that you’d pay for everything.”

“D-did we really agree on that?”

“Yes. You also promised to call me "Ojou-sama" all day and that you’d walk on all fours.”

“That’s clearly a lie, isn’t it?!”

Shido screamed. Mayuri, holding back her laughter, let out a small *Puh*¹.

“What do you think? it’s your fault for forgetting about it, isn’t it?”

“Well, that’s true but.....”

“Anyway, let’s go.”

She curtly said that and started walking away.

“Ah, wait a little, Mayuri~!”

Shido hastily went after Mayuri and, after matching his pace with hers, he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well, where did you want to go?”

“.....Nh.”

Shido asked while they were walking. Mayuri answered with a curtly attitude and slowly pointed her right hand forward.

Shido looked to where she was pointing at. There were gaming machines like the crane and those for dancing aligned there. He saw a big arcade.

“The arcade? Well, did you want to come to this place Mayuri?”

“Can’t I?”

¹ "Puh" isn’t really laughter. It’s the sound they make just before laughing, holding it back. Typically, in anime for example, they put their hand on the mouth, squint and inflate their cheeks.

“No, of course you can. It’s just a little sudden. You don’t look like someone who plays video games.”

“Actually, I don’t play.”

Mayuri said that with a haughty face. Shido opened his eyes like saying "Eh?".

“Then, why?”

After listening to Shido’s question, Mayuri hesitated for a bit before speaking. Only then did she begin to move her lips.

“.....It’s because you said it is fun.”

“Mayuri.....”

Shido suddenly felt a tickling sensation and scratched his cheek with his finger.

“Ah~.....Well, shall we go in?”

“Nh.”

They entered the arcade together.

Since today was a holiday, there were lots of student-looking youths inside the arcade. He could also see whole families in the corner where the crane games were at here and there.

“Well then, since we came here, let’s have some fun. What do you want to play?”

“Nh.....I don’t understand a lot about this, so I’d like to try something easy.”

“Something easy huh? Well, I think that if you lower the difficulty level you could also play dance and fighting games.....”

“.....Ah.”

While Shido was making his brain work, Mayuri raised her voice as if noticing something.

“Nh? What’s wrong Mayuri?”

“That. I’ve seen it before.”

To what Mayuri pointed to after saying this was the *photo-sticker* machines section, which were lined up in a corner of the arcade.

“Ah, the *photo-stickers* huh? You’re also interested in that sort of thing Mayuri?”

“Well, a little. But I’ve never used one before.”

“*Fu~mh*Since we’re here, want to take a picture?”

“Yes.”

Mayuri slightly nodded. Shido, as he walked skillfully among the people, managed to reach the area where the *photo-stickers* machines were at.

And,when he was about to step inside one, Mayuri hit him on the shoulder *Tap, tap* as if noticing something.

“Hey, look.”

“Nh?”

After hearing that, he looked to the direction Mayuri was pointing at. There, he could see what looked like a sign written on a paper hanging on the wall.

“Let’s see what it says. "We ask that single men refrain from entering the *photo-stickers* machines section."?”

After Shido read what was written on the sign, Mayuri widened her eyes with a surprised look.

“How can this be? Isn’t this gender discrimination?”

“*U~mh*Well, strictly speaking, you may be right. But I think I remember it became like this after some hidden photo cases in the past.”

“*Fuu~mh*”

“But anyway, we shouldn’t have a problem now right? Look, the paper also says: "Couples allowed".”

“Ah, that’s right.Couples?”

Upon hearing Shido’s words, Mayuri froze completely.

“.....Ah.”

At the same time, just like Mayuri, Shido also stopped where he stood. He just meant that if they were just a man and a woman, there wouldn’t be a problem using the *photo-stickers* machine. But by the way he had said it, it was out of the question that it was heard with a slightly different meaning.

“.....I wonder how everyone else will see us.”

Mayuri asked.

“Eh? That’s... ..Well, I don’t think we look like siblings.”

“Then... ..”

Having just said that, Mayuri quickly turned her face and started walking like nothing had ever happened.

At that moment, Shido thought he saw her cheeks dyed red... ..But he preferred not to say anything.

“Let’s just take the photo already.”

“Y-yes, you’re right.”

They randomly chose a booth and entered after waiting their turn.

There was a big screen on the front part of the inside, which showed Shido and Mayuri. At the same time they both entered the machine, a recording with instructions started playing.

Unlike Mayuri, Shido frequently visited the arcade. But he didn’t have a lot of experience using the *photo-stickers* machine. They took the photos accordingly to the recorded instructions.

A few seconds after that, the sticker with the photos printed on it came out from inside the machine.

“Oh, looks like it’s out.”

“True. Let’s see... ..”

Then Mayuri, seeing the recently printed photos, suddenly let out a *Puh*.

The reason was made known quickly. The advancements on the current *photo-stickers* machines were amazing. They were equipped with editing functions such as skin lightening and enlarging the eyes of the selected target... ..But Shido’s face *adjusted* with those features ended up looking pretty funny.

“*Puh*.....*Hahaha*..*Ahahahahahaha*...”

Not being able to take it anymore, Mayuri hugged her abdomen and laughed. Although that was inevitable. Mayuri ended up looking beautiful while Shido looked like a monster. Perhaps that was the real reason why single men weren’t allowed in there. That’s what Shido suspected in the end.

“Actually... ..”

After hearing Shido say this, Mayuri confusedly tilted her neck.

“... ..What’s wrong?”

“Well, I see that you can laugh like that too.”

“... ..!”

Mayuri made a surprised face at Shido's words, and then repeatedly touched her cheeks with her palms.

Then she shook her shoulders in surprise, as if finally noticing that she had a big smile on her face.

Then, she folded her arms while releasing a breath through her nose.

"... ..Well, excuse me for always being indifferent."

"I didn't say that, right? But... ..actually, the Mayuri just now looked kinda cute."

"... ..!"

After listening to what Shido said, Mayuri held her breath while her cheeks blushed slightly.

However, she immediately cleared her throat while correcting her posture and replied with an: ["I see."].

"Mo-more importantly, I want to try that one now."

"That one? Ah, the crane eh?"

Shido whispered as he walked toward the machine Mayuri told him of. Inside the box made of a transparent acrylic, there were many adorable little mascots.

"Is this difficult?"

"*U~mh*...Well, it may be hard to get the hang of it the first time, but there are some that seem easy to get. How about we try... ..?"

Right when Shido was about to finish that sentence...

"Kukuku... ..Shido and Mayuri. What are you doing in this place?"

They heard a voice from behind them and turned to its direction as if taken by it.

There they saw a girl, striking a very cool pose, who was wearing a black T-shirt with alphabetic characters printed on it, a skirt with a cross pattern, and was also wearing silver accessories.

"Eh? Kaguya?"

Shido said the name of the girl standing there while opening his eyes wide.

Kaguya, while constantly changing her pose, made an amused face like saying "*Haha~~n*" as if realizing something.

“I see, I see. So you were having a secret rendezvous in a place like this, eh? Kaka... You look like someone who doesn't care about such things, but I see that you can't be left alone for too long, right?”

Hearing Kaguya's words, Shido and Mayuri's cheeks went red in an instant.

“"Se-secret rendezvous?"”

“That is... ..not completely wrong.”

The two of them looked away in embarrassment. Kaguya for some reason, being influenced by their embarrassment, began to hesitate to speak.

“... ..No, well, if you act like that, I'm going to get embarrassed as well... ..”

Kaguya scratched her cheek with a finger, and then placed her hand on her waist as if recovering her energy.

“Anyway! Reasons aside, the fact that you are standing on my battle-ground doesn't change! There's no problem if I take that action as a challenge, right?!”

“Battle-ground... ..? Challenge... ..?”

After Mayuri tilted her neck, Kaguya strongly pointed at the crane game machine.

“Of course, I'm talking about the forbidden box that harbors treasures! Using one golden coin of darkness as a sacrifice, let's decide in battle which one of us gets the treasure first!”

“... ..Ehh... In short, you're asking her to compete in the crane game?”

“You can also put it that way!”

Shido spoke as her translator, and Kaguya nodded proudly.

“Wait, I think this is Mayuri's first time on the crane game.”

“In that case, you can be her support, Shido. It'll be your *first task as a couple*².”

“Wha... ..? Hey, hey...”

Shido said while sweat ran down his cheeks, but it seemed like Kaguya wasn't paying attention. She raised a 100 yen coin she took from her chest pocket and, after making it spin around the air where she was standing, put it inside the crane game.

“Oh, box! Answer to my voice! Awaken now!”

² Here Kaguya says: [初めての共同作業]. This phrase is used to announce the wedding cake cutting by both bride and groom at a wedding. Literally means: "the first task together".

When Kaguya shouted that, the crane game machine lit up brightly and the mechanical arm started moving.

“What a problem... ..What do we do Mayuri?”

“Let’s do it. We were planning to do it anyway.”

“Well, that’s true.”

After saying this, Shido took out a 100 yen coin and put it inside the machine next to the one where Kaguya was playing at with enthusiasm.

“... ..Alright. Mayuri, I’m going to check the arm’s position from the side of the machine. Let go of the button when I give you the signal.”

“Nh. Alright.”

The hardest part of the crane game is calculating the distance in depth. Then, if the arm’s position is confirmed from the front and from the side with two or more people, the possibilities of getting something increase significantly.

“Ka~~kakaka! Gaze upon my diabolical handling of the button! Special movement! *Teufel Marionette*³!”

Kaguya shouted exaggeratedly while repeatedly hitting the button which made a *Ga, ga, ga, ga, ga!* noise. But since those were consecutive hits, the mechanical arm grabbed the air without moving.

“Now, Mayuri!”

“Okay!”

Mayuri let go of the button at Shido’s signal. Then, the mechanical arm grabbed one of the mascots and dropped it in the place to get it.

“Ah, we got it.”

“What~~?!”

Hearing Mayuri’s words, Kaguya was greatly surprised.

“I-impossible! I can’t believe you could beat my *Teufel Marionette*... ..!”

“No. You mustn’t hit the button repeatedly, right?... ..”

While Shido laughed forcibly, Kaguya suddenly extended her hands.

“It’s not over yet! This isn’t over yet! Last *Ougi! Loto Schwingung*⁴!”

³ トイフェル・マリオネッテ(魔刻操腕拳): *Teufel Marionette* <Fist of the Manipulating Arm of the Demon’s Time>. *Teufel*: demon (in german). *Marionette*: a puppet.

Kaguya, after screaming that, placed her hands on the machine frame and started shaking it.

“He-hey, Kaguya, if you do that, then... ..”

While Shido was trying to stop her, two big shadows suddenly appeared behind Kaguya’s back. ----They were the arcade’s employees.

“Dear cus~~tomer, shaking the machines is prohibited, right?”

“You’ll have to come to the office with us for a few moments, yes?”

“Wha-what’s wrong with you, you bastards? Wait! The duel isn’t over yet! Ah! Wait! No, let me goooooooooo~~~!”

The two burly employees grabbed Kaguya by the arms and dragged her away, like she was a recently-captured alien.

After seeing that, Mayuri let out a stunned voice.

“... ..What was that all about?”

“Like anyone would know... ..”

Shido said that while laughing forcibly. Then, he bent his knees and took out a small doll from the crane machine.

It was a cute angel character. It had a chain on its head to be hanged with. for example, a bag.

“Mayuri, for you.”

When Shido gave her that, Mayuri opened her eyes wide with a surprised look.

“Eh?”

“What’s wrong? Didn’t you want it?”

“But we won that with your money, Shido.”

“Then, it’s a gift. As a memento of today. Let me do that much at least.”

“... ..Nh.”

Mayuri hesitated for a moment, but in the end she nodded slightly and hung the doll on her bag.

⁴⁴ ロート・シュヴィングング (紅蓮響震掌): Loto Schwingung <Shaking Vibrating Palm of the Crimson Lotus Flower>. Schwingung: oscillation, vibration (in german).

Looks like the pets hanging on Mayuri's bag, a lion, a bird and a bottle of milk, had a new companion.

"Well then... ..Where do we go now?"

Shido, who was walking through the streets after fully enjoying the arcade, asked that to Mayuri, who was walking next to him.

Mayuri placed her finger on her chin for a few seconds while thinking, and then moved her eyebrows like saying "Ah", as if she had remembered something.

"Right. There was something I wanted to see."

"Something you wanted to see? A movie or something like that?"

"No. That's not what I'm talking about. Let's see, in this area... .."

Mayuri walked along the road while looking around everywhere.

Then, she finally located a store and stopped in her tracks.

"Ah, this should do."

"Here... ..?"

After seeing the facade of the store and the displayed products, Shido went speechless for an instant.

At first glance, it looked like a clothing shop... ..But looking carefully, he could see that those clothes were the ones used by anime and manga characters.

That's right. This was one of those stores called *Cosplay Shop*.

"Mayuri... ..are you into cosplay?"

"Well, it's not about that... .."

Mayuri entered the shop while speaking unclearly.

It would be a lie to say that such behavior did not attract his attention, but today he had promised to go with Mayuri to wherever she wanted to go. Shido followed her and entered the store too.

Then, after watching the inside of the shop with curious eyes, Mayuri started looking for a costume, a wig, and other things.

"Ah, this... .."

At that moment, Mayuri raised her voice signaling that she had found something.

Upon looking at her, he could tell that she was carrying some sort of a uniform. A black blazer and a blue skirt. On the chest part of it was an "R" shaped emblem. It was the uniform of Raizen high school, where Shido currently attended.

"The Raizen uniform? What's it doing in a place like this?"

"Now that you mention it, I think it's written in the front of the store that they buy and sell used costumes."

"And it's alright to treat this like a costume?!"

For some reason, he suddenly began to think of the shop as a suspicious one...
...But, well, it was possible for someone who wasn't a student to see the school uniform and believe it to be a costume. It was very likely that a graduated Raizen student sold it to this shop.

"... ...*Fuu~mh*."

After looking at the uniform for a few moments, Mayuri walked away with it towards the fitting room, and closed the curtain.

A few minutes after that.

"... .."

Mayuri appeared once again. This time, wearing the Raizen high school uniform.

"... ...How do I look?"

"*Hee~*...Your usual white uniform suits you well, but I think this one looks really good on you too. How should I say it? It makes you look a bit more mature."



Shido said what he honestly believed. It was the first time he saw Mayuri wearing the Raizen uniform, but, surprisingly, he felt it suited her.

“I see.”

Mayuri curtly, although somehow looking happy, answered that. Then, after spinning and waving her skirt where she stood, she closed the curtain once again.

Then she changed to her previous clothing and left the fitting room.

“Well, you changed already? That’s a shame.”

“This is fine. As for me, I’m done.”

“... ...? "As for me"?”

While Shido tilted his neck, Mayuri approached him and handed him the Raizen uniform she was carrying, a wig , and some hair ornaments.

“Well then, this is for you.”

“...Ha?”

In an instant his eyes turned into dots.

But having understood the situation a moment later, Shido spoke with a trembling voice while a dry smile appeared on his face.

“A-ah... ..I see. You’re telling me to pay for it, right? So that you can use it. So that *YOU*~~ can use it!”

He repeated it twice to emphasize. However, Mayuri moved her neck sideways.

“No. I’m asking you to try this on, Shido.”

“*WHY?!*”

He accidentally spoke in English. However, that was totally understandable. After all, the clothes that Mayuri gave him consisted of a blouse, a cardigan, and a skirt. No matter how you looked at it, it was a girl’s clothing.

“You’re asking "why"?... ..Well, because I want to see it with my own eyes too. The famous Shiori-chan.

“Wha-wha... ...?”

Shido’s cheeks shuddered. Shiori-chan was the alias Shido used when, due to certain circumstances, had no other choice but to dress like a woman. To Shido, it was a dark past inside his dark past, and he didn’t want to transform ever again.

“Eh?... ..Is it impossible?”

“Of course it’s impossible! Or rather, when you said you wanted to see something, is this what you meant?!”

After Shido screamed, Mayuri twisted her lips a little as a sign of moodiness.

“But you saw me cosplaying...”

“You tried that on your own, didn’t you?!”

“... ..But everyone saw her, and I alone didn’t. That’s not fair. Or does it bother you that much to wear the same clothes that I used?”

“*Ugu*... ..”

Shido always got very weak when they looked at him like that. He hesitated for a few seconds, but, in the end, grabbed everything with a big sigh.

“... ..But just this once, alright?”

“Yes.”

Mayuri nodded sincerely. She was not one to show a lot of expression changes, but, strangely, it seemed like a sense of excitement could be felt hovering over her face.

“... ..For God’s sake.”

After letting out another breath, he entered the fitting room and reluctantly changed into the costume.

Then, after putting on the wig, he checked his figure on the mirror and opened the curtain.

“... ..Here you go. Are you satisfied with this?”

His voice was still his natural voice because he didn’t have the voice transformer, but his appearance completely showed the figure of a girl.

Mayuri, who was waiting in front of the fitting room, opened her eyes wide in surprise.

“... ..Amazing. You are *that*, far more than I expected.”

“What do you mean, “*that*”?!”

Shido, with half closed eyes replied to Mayuri, who spoke in amazement.

“But it really is incredible. I thought you had a neutral face, but this is...”

“Please, stop... ..I want to live a normal life.”

“Ee~~. It’s an exceptional talent ~~! It would be a waste not to improve it~~.”

“Yeah... ..It’s amazing. It’s a lot cuter than a careless girl, right?”

“No, no, I think you’re exaggerating... ..”

“But, what are you saying?! "Two for one"⁵, it’s a phrase made for you, Darling~~.”

“... ..Nh?”

At that moment, both Shido and Mayuri tilted their necks.

It seemed like some kind of strange reply had intermingled in their conversation.

“... ..”

The two of them looked to the right at the same time. Then, they saw a tall girl with a smile on her face that extended from ear to ear standing there.

After looking at her, Shido unconsciously raised his voice.

“Miku?! How long have you been there?!”

That’s right. The one standing there was none other than Miku Izayoi, third-year student from the Rindouji Institute for Women and a top idol at the peak of her popularity.

Miku stuck out her chest triumphantly like saying “*Fufun~~*”, and then she started talking.

“I was calmly walking down the streets when my Shiori-san sensor suddenly started ringing!”

“... ..”

Hearing Miku’s words, Shido went speechless. It was probably just a coincidence, but in Miku’s case, he ended up thinking that it wouldn’t be strange for her to have a mysterious sensor like that installed.

Noticing or not what Shido was thinking, Miku twisted her body and then started speaking with a sweet tone.

“Aah~~...Being able to meet Shiori-san and Mayuri-san in a place like this... If this isn’t called fate, then I don’t know what to call it! And since we’re here, let’s get changed and take a picture together~~! Come on, you too Mayuri-san!”

⁵What the "person" speaking here is saying is: [一粒で二度美味しい]. It can be taken as "one candy, twice the flavor", since, apparently, is the motto of the Japanese confectionary company Glico (EzakiGlico K.K.). And it’s a reference to their chocolate with almonds candy products.

“Eh? No, I was----“

Mayuri was about to say something, but it looked like she was no match for Miku’s impetus. She gave her some sort of strangely cute costume and, somehow by force, sent her to the fitting room.

Next, Miku made a vee~~~~eery fierce smile, grabbed a costume with a high degree of skin exposure, and slowly walked towards Shido.

“Well then, let’s get you changed into this clothing, Shiori-san, shall we~~? Ah, but don’t worry~~. I’ll give you a hand with eeeverything~~ you need, okay~~?”

“He-hey, wait a moment. What’s with that clothing? Or rather, why are you moving your hands like that?! No, wai... ..Nooooooooooooo!!”

Shido’s scream resounded throughout the *Cosplay Shop*.

“... ..I can’t believe... ..I went through that... ..”

After exiting the *Cosplay Shop*, Shido walked down the street with weary steps.

In the end, after that, Shido had suggested changing into a costume with a lower degree of skin exposure, but the damage had already been done. The cosplay photo of the three of them had already been taken in great detail.

“... ..”

Mayuri walked next to Shido while silently looking at her Smartphone’s screen.

Displayed on the screen, he could see the picture of three girls, each one wearing the costume of a transformed heroine. Like those that appeared on animes that aired on Sunday mornings aimed toward young girls... ..Well, it was really the picture of two girls and one young guy.

Shido, personally, wished that she'd delete the data as soon as possible, but upon seeing Mayuri’s face, which somehow looked happy, he found himself unable to say it.

“... ..Ah, Shido.”

Then, Mayuri raised her face and suddenly said that.

“Nh?... What’s wrong?”

“There. That is.... ..?”

She said pointing toward the beginning of a bridge that resided up ahead. A big torii⁶ could be seen there.

“Ah, that’s a shrine. Have you never been to one?”

“No. I want to go. Is that okay?”

Mayuri asked him while tilting her neck.

Today, he was supposed to be dedicating his time on his date with Mayuri. How could he possibly say no? Besides, compared with the *Cosplay Shop* from a while ago, this was a hundred times better. Shido nodded in confirmation like saying "Of course".

They crossed the bridge, passed beneath the huge torii, and entered the shrine grounds.

The *pathway—sandou*—⁷ that extended and led to the *inner sanctuary—honden*—⁸, adorned on the sides with *komainu*⁹, stone lamps, and also trees dyed in red, produced a truly fantastic atmosphere. While feeling like they had ventured into a postcard, they advanced step by step.

“Since we’re here, shall we pray?”

“Yes.”

After nodding slightly, Mayuri took out a 5 yen coin from her purse and threw it into the *offering box—saisenbako*—¹⁰. Then she rang the bell and clapped both her hands making a *Pam, pam* sound. Shido too, following her example, performed the "nirei-nihakushu-ichirei"¹¹ and gently closed his eyes.

He needed to wish for something but nothing came to his mind. After thinking this and that, Shido settled with: "I wish for the happiness of everyone". He said these vague words to himself.

He opened his eyes and returned his united hands to their original position. At that moment, he noticed that Mayuri, who was standing next to him, was still praying.

⁶A torii (鳥居) is a traditional Japanese arch that can usually be found at the entrance of Shinto shrines, marking the border between the profane and the sacred space. It consists of two columns on which two parallel crossbars, often colored in red or vermilion hues, are based.

⁷A sandō (参道 approaching road) in Japanese architecture is the path that leads both to a Shinto shrine and a Buddhist temple.

⁸The honden (本殿 main shrine) is the most sacred building in a Shinto shrine, made specifically for use of the God consecrated in the sanctuary.

⁹Komainu (狛犬) is the name given to the pair of animals, with hybrid form between the dog and the lion, who usually guards the entrance to the *inner sanctuary* or *honden*.

¹⁰Saisenbako (賽銭箱) - literally "saisen box", the box that collects the offerings, usually located near the entrance or in front of a shrine’s halls.

¹¹"Nirei-nihakushu-ichirei"[二礼二拍手一礼] Lit. means: "2 bows, 2 applauses and 1 bow".

A few seconds later, Mayuri opened her eyelids.

“Well, it looks like you were praying with a lot of enthusiasm, weren’t you? What did you ask for?”

After hearing Shido’s question, Mayuri suddenly loosened her lips.

“It wasn’t a big deal.Just... ..I asked for this day to go on forever. Just that.

“... ..”

Hearing those words, Shido ended up staring at Mayuri for a few moments.

The words themselves weren’t a big deal. It was almost the same thing as Shido’s wish.

However----How could this be? Looking at Mayuri’s face, who said that, he felt something similar to a strange sense of ephemerality.

“... ..? What’s wrong, Shido?”

“No... ..It’s nothing.”

Shido answered ambiguously causing Mayuri to tilt her neck doubtfully. Then she continued with her words.

“By the way, let’s go get our fortune. We’re in a shrine after all.”

“Y-yes, you’re right.”

After answering, the two of them, side by side, walked from the *inner sanctuary—honden*—to the site where they could get their fortune.

Then, in that place, they saw the familiar figure of someone who was already there.

“Nh? That’s... ..”

It was a small framed girl that was wearing an adorable hat. On her left hand, she had a funny looking puppet rabbit.

That’s right. It was the girl that lived in the apartment next to the Itsuka residence, Yoshino, and her friend, "Yoshinon".

“Yoshino and Yoshinon, you’re here, eh?”

“Ah----Shido-san, Mayuri-san.”

“»Arara~~. You two also came to pray ~~?”

"Yoshinon" began moving her mouth, opening and closing it, while gesticulating and alternatively looking at the faces of both Shido and Mayuri. Mayuri nodded in answer to that.

"Yes. It's as you say. And since we were already here, we thought we'd get our fortune."

Mayuri replied. Then, "Yoshinon" started shaking her hands.

"»Oh, really? Actually, the two of us also got our fortune. Come on, Come on, Yoshino~~, why don't you show them~~?"

"Ah, yes."

Yoshino showed them two small pieces of paper she had on the palm of her hand.

Upon looking at them, Shido and Mayuri raised their voices in astonishment: ["Hee."]

"Amazing. The two of you got "good fortune"."

"Looks like you have the Goddess of fortune on your side, right, girls?"

Hearing Shido and Mayuri's words, Yoshino laughed sheepishly while "Yoshinon" laughed proudly.

"Well, we can't be left behind, right? Let's see, will it be enough to put the Money in here...?"

Shido put a 100 yen coin in the box and, sincerely wishing for the best, took out his fortune. He opened it and checked the letters that were written on it.

"... .. Eh?! Bad fortune?!"

He unconsciously made a sour face. There, on the small sheet of paper, the two words that signaled the worst possible fortune were written.

"»Arara~~. *Don't mind that.*"

"Please, don't be depressed , Shido-san... .."

"Y-yeah... .."

While laughing bitterly at Yoshino's consoling words, he let out a sigh *Haa*. Next, Shido looked toward Mayuri's direction.

"How about you, Mayuri?"

"Nh... .."

After hearing Shido's question, Mayuri showed him and Yoshino the fortune she got.

The words written there were----"Bad fortune".

“»Ee~~?! You too, Mayuri-chan?! How sinister~~!”

After seeing that, "Yoshinon" crushed her cheeks with both hands and took a pose like Munch's "The Scream"¹². Yoshino continued her words hastily, trying to help.

“But-but... what it says there doesn't always actually happen... ..”

“Nh... ..?”

However, at that moment, Shido tilted his neck.

“... ..”

Even though she got bad luck, for some reason, it looked like Mayuri had, if only a little, a happy face.

Yoshino and "Yoshinon" probably noticed that too. With a puzzled face, they asked Mayuri.

“»Eh? Mayuri-chan, do you like bad luck?”

“You look... somehow... .. happy.”

“No... .. That's not it. It's just that----“

She did not get a chance to finish. Out of nowhere, a sudden gust of wind blew and lifted the surrounding fallen leaves into the air.

He thought that Mayuri might've actually said something in that moment... ..But he wasn't able to hear it too well because her voice had mixed in with the noise the wind had made.

After separating from Yoshino and "Yoshinon", Shido and Mayuri were once again walking through the city.

“Well then, where do we go now?”

“Nh. I've decided where we'll go. There.”

After saying that, Mayuri pointed at a store on the other side of the road.

“There?... .. Isn't that a 100 yen store? Are you sure? We don't always have an opportunity like this...”

¹² The Scream, is the title of four paintings of Norwegian Edvard Munch (1863-1944).

Shido raised his voice in surprise. That's right. It was just an ordinary 100 yen shop. Frankly speaking, it's a store that they could go to whenever they wanted.

"I'm sure. I've always... ..wanted to go."

However, Mayuri genuinely said that and stared into Shido's eyes.

If she really wanted to go, Shido had no objection. He replied: ["I see."], and the two of them entered the store.

Its interior was filled with many different items, sweets, and other things that were that were put up on display. This was obvious, but everything there costed a mere 100 yen. Today, it is but a normal shop for Shido. However, this store was really something extraordinary. The first time he visited one, he was enveloped by an amazing sense of omnipotence.

If Mayuri had never visited a store like this before, then he could understand why she had an interest in it. In fact, ever since they arrived, Mayuri quickly began looking around curiously inside the store.

Then...

"... ..¿Nh?"

When he was walking around the store following Mayuri, Shido came across a curious group of two people.

One of them was a girl with hair that touched the edge of her shoulders, and facial features like that of a doll. The other one was a girl with braided hair, and an expression that looked as if she was walking on the moon.

Those two girls had loaded their shopping basket with various items and were talking in whispers about something while squatting.

"... ..That way, even if you are short on money, depending on your wits and how you use it, you can make it here."

"Admiration. Amazing, master Origami. That will serve me a great deal."

"In particular, the usefulness of this nylon fishing line is really wide. It never hurts to have a few."

"Question. How do you use these plastic seals?"

"That's also a very useful item. If you bring his hands behind his back and tie Shido's thumbs together... .. I mean, your target's, that alone is enough to replace a pair of handcuffs for thumbs. If you can restrict the movements of his hands, the rest depends on us"

"Shudder. I see. I'll remember that."

“... ...Origami, Yuzuru. What are you two doing in a place like this?”

After Shido said that with half closed eyes, the girls----Origami Tobiichi and Yuzuru Yamai, shook their shoulders in surprise.

“Shido, why are you here?”

“Astonishment. You surprised me.”

“... ...No, I was the one surprised!”

Shido pointed at the shopping basket that was next to the girls while sweat ran down his cheek.

The basket’s contents consisted of ordinary sundries But why did he have such a bad feeling? Shido could only feel a sinister aura emanating from them and nothing else.

“You two, what do you plan to do with...?”

When Shido was about to finish his sentence, Origami and Yuzuru suddenly stood and both raised a hand quickly.

“I remembered something urgent. Take care, Shido.”

“Agreement. Especially on moonless nights.”

After saying that, they walked quickly to the cash register.

Honestly , Shido felt that he had to figure out what exactly those two were up to... ...But since he was also afraid of hearing something he didn't want to, he preferred to remain silent.

Then, Mayuri suddenly poked her face around the corner of a shelf.

“Shido, what are you doing?”

“Nh. No... ... I’m sorry. Just looking at something.”

It would be a problem if his interest ended up being caught in this world... Shido vaguely dissimulated and walked towards Mayuri.

She was in the area where the toys were displayed, next to the corner of miscellaneous items in which Shido was. After confirming that Shido had arrived, she pointed at one of the pendants displayed on the shelf and looked at Shido’s face.

“I want... ...this.”

“Eh?”

Hearing Mayuri's words, Shido opened his eyes wide. The pendant Mayuri pointed at was cute, that much was true, but it had a quality that was definitely appropriate for a 100 yen shop. Perhaps, it would be lovely to see an elementary schoolgirl using it, but he felt it would be inappropriate for a young girl of Mayuri's age.

"I don't have a problem with it... ..But you can always ask for something better, you know?"

"No need. I want this one. I can't?"

"No, of course you can. Well, shall we go pay for it?"

"Yes."

Mayuri nodded slightly. Shido took in his hands the pendant Mayuri had pointed at, went to the cash register, and paid for it.

At that moment, he thought he saw two girls on the adjacent cash register that were paying for a lot of useful articles. Ignoring what they could be used for, Shido decided to act like he hadn't seen anything.

"Mayuri, here."

After leaving the store, he took the pendant from the bag and offered it to Mayuri.

"... .."

However, Mayuri didn't take it. Instead, she silently pointed her finger up to her neck.

For a moment, he didn't understand what Mayuri was trying to say----But he soon figured it out. Shido, with a forced smile, put the pendant around Mayuri's neck.

"... ..*Fufu*."

Mayuri spun ,with her fingertips, the pendant that decorated her chest and flashed a big smile.

"How do I look?"

"Yes, it really suits you... .. Although, would it be right to say that? But... ..Yes, you look very cute."

"... ..I see."

Hearing Shido's compliment, Mayuri, after answering that looking somewhat embarrassed, said in a low voice: ["-----Thank you."].

After leaving the 100 yen store, while peacefully walking through the city, Mayuri suddenly stopped in her tracks as if she had found something.

“Hey, Shido, what’s that?”

“That?”

When looking at the place Mayuri was staring at, he could see that there was a sign with the picture of a cat drawn on it. Shido opened his mouth while slightly nodding.

“That’s what they call a "Neko Café".”

“Neko Café?”

“That’s right. In short, it’s a cafe where you can drink while playing with cats. The menu also features things based on cats.”

“*Fuu~n*...”

Mayuri answered that while looking at the cat that was drawn on the sign.

She didn’t seem to be too interested in it... ..But it wasn’t like that. Mayuri’s voice was desultory, but her eyes seemed to be sparkling with a strange gleam.

“Shall we go in for a while?”

“Eh? Nh... ..But this was not a part of our plans...”

“No problem. Today I’ll accompany you anywhere you want, Mayuri.”

Hearing Shido say that, Mayuri, looking a little embarrassed, said: [“—... ..Alright, but just for a while.”].

“Then, it’s decided. Well, shall we go inside now?”

Shido entered the Neko Café with Mayuri.

“*Waa*... ..”

They could see that the inside of the store had a lot of cats of different species. Some of them were huddled together, others stretching, and others purring.

However, in contrast, they couldn’t see a single person. Today was a holiday. The fact that there weren’t any customers was, definitely, something unnatural... ..But maybe this wasn’t a well known shop.

While Shido was thinking such rude things, a girl who appeared to be an employee, approached them running kind of giddily from behind a counter.

“Umm, we’re truly sorry. But it just so happens that a client reserved the local store for today... ..”

After saying that, the employee lowered her head looking distressed... Shido nodded like he had understood. So that’s why there wasn’t anyone there.

“Ah, I see. Nh~... That’s a shame.”

“Can’t help it. There are still some other places I want to go to, so let’s go.”

“Nh. Let’s do that.”

But----when Shido and Mayuri were about to leave the shop after rotating 180°, a girl with black hair wearing drab clothing arrived. Maybe something good had happened to her, because she was humming a song seemingly in a good mood.

“Eh? Kurumi... ...?”

After seeing her face, Shido said her name unconsciously.

That’s right. The one who had entered the shop was none other than Kurumi Tokisaki.

“Eh? Ah----Shi-Shido-san?!”

Looks like at that moment, Kurumi finally noticed Shido and Mayuri. She shook her shoulders and clearly made an expression of surprise.

Then, just to match with that, the Neko Café employee raised her voice.

“Ah, welcome. We were waiting for you. Thank you very much for today’s reservation.”

The employee made a small reverence. Maybe because she saw that, sweat began to flow from Kurumi’s face.

“Well, so you were the one who reserved the place, huh, Kurumi?”

“You like cats, right?”

“Y-you’re wrong! It wasn’t me!”

After listening to what Shido and Mayuri said, Kurumi strongly moved her neck sideways while letting out a shrill voice.

“Eh? Then why did you come to this shop...?”

“I just made a mistake. I thought this was an ordinary cafeteria, but it looks like I’m wrong, right? I have never been to a place like this. ----Well then, Shido-san, Mayuri-san, have a nice day.”

Kurumi bowed while, strangely, speaking quickly and trying to leave the store.

But, maybe because she was in a hurry, she ended up hooking the bag in her hand on the rack and its content scattered all over the carpet.

“Kyah!”

“Wow, are you alright?”

“Be more careful.”

Shido and Mayuri crouched and gathered the contents of the bag which were scattered in the area.

Then...

“... ..Nh? What’s this? " Neko Café Kitty Park points card"... ..?”

“*Wah*...It has an incredible amount of seals.”

“*Uoh*...You’re right. This is amazing. I wonder just how many times you have to come here to get this many seals... ..”

“Ah, look at this. There are a lot of cat toys here. *My Neko Jarashi*¹³... ..?”

“Kya~~~h!”

While Shido and Mayuri looked curiously through what was inside the bag, Kurumi raised her voice like a cry and began to snatch everything from their hands.

“Kurumi, after all, you... ..”

“You are wrong! This, well... ..This is something I picked up! I was just about to take them to the police box!”

Kurumi explained while shoving the points card and cat toys in the bag. It seems like she wanted to stubbornly emphasize that there was no relationship between her and this store.

However, at the next moment, the cats in the store started meowing. they approached Kurumi and rested their paws on her legs.

----It was like they were saying "play with us" or "give me a snack, please".

“Ah...Uh....Ah....Ah... ..”

With an attitude that said she could not alienate the cats gathered at her feet even if she wanted to, Kurumi flushed her cheeks and put on a troubled face.

¹³*Neko Jarashi*, is the name of the herb *Setaria viridis*, commonly called foxtail, and it’s also the name given to the typical cat toy, based on the form of this herb, which consists of a rod in which in one end, it has an item that gets the attention of cats. "My Neko Jarashi" is one of such toys, but more personal.

“... ..Mayuri.”

“Nh... ..”

... ..At this point, they began to feel sorry for her. Shido and Mayuri exchanged glances and nodded at the same time.

“Well then, looks like it’s as you say. Sorry, sorry, I was wrong.”

“That’s right. Kurumi would never come to a Neko Café.”

They said that clearly not believing it. they passed by Kurumi, who still had her face red, and left the store.

----About 20 minutes after that, Shido and Mayuri had reached a nearby supermarket.

It felt more like a family shopping trip than a date... ..But since this was Mayuri’s first time there, it couldn’t be helped.

But she didn’t seem to have a defined objective. Shido was walking around the store following Mayuri, who was looking at the foodstuff with great interest.

“*Hee*... ..They’ve got everything here, right? Do you buy here often, Shido?”

“Yes. Depending on the day, I also buy in the shopping district and other stores, but I come here quite often because it’s close to my house.”

“*Fuu~mh*... ..”

When Mayuri said that, her stomach let out a charming sound *Guu... ..*.

“... ..!”

She placed her hands on her belly and looked away in embarrassment.

“Ahaha... Come to think of it, we haven’t had lunch yet. You’re hungry, aren’t you? Being in the foodstuff section with an empty stomach is tempting, right?”

Shido said that while shrugging, and looked around.

“Once we leave, should we go eat something? There are many stores in the area. Although, we could also buy bread or onigiri and go eat at the park.”

Mayuri raised her face as if remembering something.

“Nh... ..If we go eat, there’s a place I’d like to go. Could we have lunch there?”

“Yes, of course. But let’s not go to a very expensive place, alright?”

“No problem. You are an expert at washing dishes, right, Shido?”

“Could you not continue the conversation with the premise that I'll have to wash the dishes?! Please?!”

Shido's cheek twitched slightly and Mayuri loosened her cheeks with a *Fufuh*.

Then, from behind, a familiar voice resounded.

“----Ara? Shido and... ..Mayuri?”

“Nh... ..?”

They turned around in response to the voice. There, a girl wearing her long hair tied with two black ribbons, stood carrying a shopping basket in her hand. ----It was Shido's little sister, Kotori Itsuka.

Kotori put on an expression of surprise at first, but then she looked as if having understood the situation and nodded significantly.

“Ah... ..I was wondering why you had left the house so early on a holiday, but I see now.”

Shido wasn't really hiding it or anything, but receiving that attitude, for some reason, he ended up feeling embarrassed. He replied while scratching his cheek.

“The-there's nothing wrong with it, right?”

“That's right. I didn't say it was a bad thing. And I'm not going to do something as rude as interrupting someone else's date.”

Kotori let out a sigh like saying "*yare, yare*". Despite her being younger than Shido, it looked the other way around.

“... ..Wait. Kotori, what do you have in the basket?”

Shido pointed at the shopping basket that Kotori was carrying. It was filled with Chupa Chups, Kotori's favorite candy.

“Don't you think that buying that many is an exaggeration... ..?!”

“I-I can't help it! It's a new flavor! ----And more importantly, Mayuri, if Shido does something to you tell me right away, okay? His face is that of Shiori-chan, but a man will always be a man, right?”

“Nh. Alright.”

“Hey, wait a moment! Wait in many ways!”

After Shido squinted, Kotori stuck her tongue out and began to move away from there.

“Well then, I’ll be going. But remember, if it gets too late I’ll end up suspecting a lot of things, okay?”

“Ah, hey, wait! Save the candy for after lunch!”

Shido yelled at Kotori’s back while she left. She took a short glance at Shido and waved her hand slightly.

After seeing that and letting out a small sigh, Shido looked at Mayuri.

“Well then... ..Shall we go eat something? If I remember correctly, you said there was a place you wanted to go... ..”

Shido stopped his words.

Mayuri, at some point, had crouched and picked up a lollipop----a Chupa Chups.

“... ..New flavor...”

Mayuri said that and stared at the candy with great interest.

“... ..Please. Save it for after lunch.”

That scene was, strangely, so adorable, that it made Shido laugh unintentionally.

After leaving the supermarket, Mayuri took Shido to a curry shop located in a corner of some street.

Apparently it was a popular store where large queues were formed, but, maybe because it was a little past lunch time, they both were able to enter the store without having to queue.

Shido ordered a *katsu-curry*¹⁴, and Mayuri ordered a *karaage-curry*¹⁵. From both plates, a pleasant aroma, and a complex mixture of spices, rose and made their stomachs growl.

“Oh, it looks delicious, doesn’t it? Well then, let’s eat.”

“Let’s eat.”

Shido and Mayuri brought their hands together while facing each other, then they grabbed the spoon and ate the curry at the same time.

“Nnh! Delicious! And not just the curry, this *katsu*’s crunching is irresistible!”

¹⁴Katsu-curry (カツカレー): curry rice served with a breaded pork cutlet on top.

¹⁵Karaage-curry (唐揚げカレー): curry rice with pieces of fried chicken meat on top.

“Nh... ..You’re right, it’s delicious.”

Mayuri nodded to sympathize with Shido’s words.

Then, she ate some more curry, and after that, she began to stare at Shido’s plate.

“Nh? Is something wrong, Mayuri?”

“That looks delicious.”

She said that and pointed at the *katsu* on top of Shido’s curry.

“Ah, you want a bite?”

“... ..”

While Mayuri’s cheeks blushed, she nodded slightly in agreement. That behavior was so funny it made Shido laugh *Haha*.

“... ...?”

“Ah, no, I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Here.”

Shido said that and put a piece of *katsu* on Mayuri’s plate.

“Thank you. ----Then, take this.”

Then, as in appreciation, Mayuri gave some of her *karaage* to Shido.

“Oh, *thank you*. ---- Maybe doing this is the true pleasure of eating with someone else, right?”

“Yes... ..you are right.”

Shido showed her a smile and Mayuri, in response to that, flashed a bigger smile.

“But this is truly delicious. Now I see why you wanted to eat this, Mayuri.”

“Nh... ..No...”

Mayuri replied awkwardly to Shido’s words.

“To be honest, the most important objective was not the curry.”

“Eh? Then, why did you say you wanted to come here?”

Mayuri slowly raised her hand and pointed at the piece of *katsu* on her plate.

“This.”

“... ..Nh?”

“I wanted to... ... have this kind of exchange.”

Maybe because it was a bit embarrassing to say that, Mayuri whispered while looking slightly away.

Hearing such a cute reason, Shido answered: [“I see.”], and showed a smile once again.

Then...

“... ..Eh?”

As if coinciding with that, for some reason, the inside of the store began to get noisy. Shido frowned in suspicion.

However, the reason was known immediately. After the store's door opened, a girl entered.

Night-colored hair and crystal pupils. It was a beautiful girl, impossible to forget even if you saw her once. In fact, both the employees and the customers, who appeared to be regular customers, turned to look at her.

But, it didn't quite seem like their gazes had been stolen by the girl's beauty.

“I-it can't be... ..”

“Yes... ..There's no mistaking it. It's The Queen.”

“Tha-that's her? I can't believe it... ..”

The clients were whispering. But the girl known as "The Queen" opened her eyes wide when noticing Shido and Mayuri who were sitting at the back.

“Ooh! If it isn't Shido and Mayuri! So you two also came here, huh?!”

She said that and sat on the table next to them looking happy.

That's right. The one who had entered the store was Shido's classmate and neighbor, Tohka Yatogami.

“Tohka? You'll be having lunch here as well?”

“No. I already had lunch. Now it's time for a snack!”

“Curry as a snack... ..?”

Mayuri said that with bewilderment, and then, Tohka replied energetically with an: [“Umu!”].

“This shop is amazing, you know? You wouldn't guess it but... They give me free curry!”

“Free? No, that is something I just can’t believe... ..”

“It’s true! Owner, give me that!”

Tohka firmly raised her finger and pointed at the menu that was stuck on the wall.

There it said: "Jumbo Curry Special! If you finish it in less than 10 minutes, it’s free!".

“Y... ..Yes! Right away!”

The employee that took the order went into the kitchen looking agitated.

Then, a few moments later, two employees brought the curry into a container the size of a large basin.

“He-here you go. The Jumbo Curry Special.”

“Umu!”

“Very well, the time limit is 10 minutes.You may begin.”

The employee, for some reason, spoke without enthusiasm. Tohka brought her hands together with a *Clap* and thanked them for the food. Then, she grabbed the spoon and began to bring the curry to her mouth at a terrifying speed.

Then, barely 5 minutes after starting,

“----Thank you very much for the food! Umu! Today was delicious too!”

“""Oooooooooohhhhhhhh~::~~::~... ..!""”

After Tohka brought her hands together once again, the crowd, that at some point had increased, let out a shaking voice. Then, a rain of applause was heard.

“Amazing... ..She finished the unconquerable Jumbo Special in just 5 minutes... ..”

“No wonder she’s The Queen... ..”

After seeing that, Shido and Mayuri laughed limply.

“Ah... ..I see.”

“The Queen, huh?”

The two of them exchanged a glance and let out a *Puh* at the same time.



----On the floor dyed in red because of the setting sun, two shadows were stretching.

Shido and Mayuri, who had fully enjoyed their date for a while, walked together to the park on the hill.

From its outside edge, the whole Tengu city was visible. The late afternoon sun crossed the spaces between buildings, producing an almost indescribable fantastic scenery.

Of course coming here was Mayuri's wish, but, for some reason, Shido felt like *this park* was a part of the date's development.

"I feel like no matter what happens, this is the last stop."

Shido said that while stretching slightly. Mayuri, who was watching the city with her hands placed on the fence, sent him a little sideways glance.

Then, after smiling like saying "you are right", she remained silent for a while.

But----Shido didn't feel any discomfort or smothering in that silence.

While he had no proof, he somehow thought that Mayuri, surely, felt the same as him. Even if they weren't talking, you could say it was a relaxing atmosphere. At some point, that feeling had appeared between the two of them.

"----Hey, Shido."

Who knows how much time had passed.

Suddenly, Mayuri started talking.

"I... ..had a dream."

"A dream... ..?"

"Yes. A dream. A really... ..terrifying one."

"What dream? Was there a ghost in it?"

"No. It wasn't that kind of dream. But----"

Mayuri continued her words as she looked at Tengu city with a distant look.

"Nobody could see me. Even if I walked, even if I was standing nearby, even if I spoke, no one----noticed my existence."

"That... ..really sounds like a terrifying dream."

Shido said that while frowning slightly.

People become people as they interact with other people... ...Somebody once said that¹⁶. If you were conscious, but no one could see you... If no one could hear you... If your hand couldn't reach anyone...

That would definitely be----an unthinkable situation....with a whole lot of suffering.

She was just talking about a dream. But even so, due to the fact that Mayuri had to feel that terror, even if it was for a short time, Shido couldn't help but distort his face.

“But, you know?...”

Maybe guessing Shido's thoughts, Mayuri continued her words.

“Inside that terrifying, terrifying dream, there was one, and only one, salvation.”

“Salvation... ...?”

“Yes. ----There was someone that took notice of me, even when nobody could see me.”

“*Hee*Well, I'm happy to hear that.”

After Shido said that, Mayuri, looking like she couldn't hold it anymore, put on a big smile.

“*Fu**Fufuh* ...”

“Wha-what is it?”

“*Fufu* ...I'm sorry. It's just that----that person...it was you, Shido.”

“Eh?”

Hearing Mayuri's words, Shido opened his eyes wide.

“M-me?”

“That's right. You... ..found me. Really, thank you very much.Well, even if I'm just talking about a dream.”

After laughing at herself, Mayuri shrugged.

“... ..”

Shido slightly moved his lips while looking at Mayuri.

¹⁶ This could be a reference to a similar phrase said in the D-LIVE!! manga.

“... ..Well, how to put it? Saying this because of a dream is weird, probably, but... ..If I had that kind of special power, I...would definitely find you. Even if no one else could see you, only me, without fail---- I'd take your hand tightly.”

“... ..!”

“That’s why... ..if you ever have a problem... come to me anytime! Even if it’s in a dream or wherever!”

After making a mess with his hair, Shido exaggeratedly said that.

Then, Mayuri, after a few seconds of silence, took a deep breath and approached Shido with firm steps.

She approached to a distance where she could feel his breath, and began to stare into his eyes.

“Wha-what is it?”

“You said I could come to you anytime, so I did.”

“... ..Why you...”

Shido let out a sigh *Haa* because it seemed like Mayuri was teasing him.

Then, Mayuri slowly raised her hands, and covered Shido’s eyes. His visual field colored by the setting sun suddenly turned completely dark.

“Hey, hey, what are you----“

At the next moment.

Shido interrupted his words in half.

If we were to say it right, they were interrupted.

----Physically, by Mayuri’s lips.

“... ..?!”

For a moment, he didn’t know what had happened because his visual field was still darkened, but a second later, his brain understood the situation.

But, even if he understood, he couldn’t do anything about it. He didn’t hug or step away from Mayuri. He just stood still as a statue.

A few seconds after that, Mayuri separated her lips from Shido’s and removed her hands from his eyes.

“----I’m truly happy that you were the one who found me.”

She licked her lips mischievously and, just like that, began to walk away.

“He-hey, Mayuri?!”

“See you around, Shido. ----Let’s meet...again.”

Mayuri slightly waved her hand as if saying that it would be rude to say more than what had already been said.

“... ...Good grief. She’s... ...”

Shido strongly scratched his cheek and let out a big sigh. Right now, fortunately, his face was covered by the setting sun. Had it not been like that, no doubt that his face would have been beet red like a tomato.

Then----

“... ...Eh?”

When Mayuri’s back could no longer be seen, Shido noticed a strange feeling.

----There were tears running down his cheek.

“Eh?... ...What’s this? Why am I crying... ...?”

Could it be that he ended up crying because he was moved by the unexpected kiss of a girl?

Or maybe----could those tears be running because he was saddened by Mayuri’s farewell?

Whatever the reason, it was too pathetic. Shido wiped his tears with his sleeve.

“How strange... ...It’s not like this is the last time I see her...”

He raised his face and spoke towards the direction Mayuri had gone.

“----See you around, Mayuri.”

As in perfect sync with it, the afternoon sun hid between the buildings.

[End]